

Edgewood

PRICE TWOPENCE.

※ PHYSICAL ※ EDUCATION ※

IN

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS.

—•—
A + PAPER

READ BY

A BROMAN, ESQ., PRESIDENT.

AT THE QUARTERLY MEETING OF THE

Swedish Gymnastic Association,

June 20th, 1891.

HISTORICAL RESUMÉ.

BEFORE dealing with the present day phase of Physical Education in our schools, it may be not only interesting, but instructive to glance back and briefly consider what place—in bygone times—has been allotted to physical training in the educational systems of different nations.

THE GREEKS :—THE PIONEERS OF HUMAN CULTURE

In doing so our attention is immediately drawn to those mighty pioneers in the field of human culture and civilisation the ancient Greeks. No people in olden or later ages devoted more time and thought, or bestowed more attention upon the education of their youth ; neither do I know of any that attained better results.

AIMED AT HARMONIOUS DEVELOPMENT OF BODY AND MIND.

With them the harmonious development of body and mind, the advancement of physical health and vigour, in conjunction with mental freshness, was the aim. The Athenians acknowledged this particularly.

PLATON says that a man who has not equally developed his body and mind is a lame and stunted being, and he recommends Games and Gymnastic Exercises as the best means of attaining this development. ARISTOTLE is of the same opinion. He contends that the development of the body must precede that of the mind. The child's education must therefore, at first, consist principally of physical exercises. During the time of growth easy exercises must be practised, and all restraint in the mode of living and working should be avoided, that the growth may not be stunted or perverted.



22400004280

20 243731

WELLCOME INSTITUTE
LIBRARY

Coll | welMOnet

Call | Pam

No. | QT 255

1891

B86A

ATHENS AND SPARTA.

These views had taken firm hold of the Athenians, and were practically applied by them in the education of their youths. In Sparta, as in Athens, education was managed by the State. But the Spartans, living under rather different conditions to those of the other Greeks, and being the most warlike tribe on the peninsula, directed their system of education almost exclusively to the formation of good soldiers; that is, their system was not distinguished by the same desire to attain perfect harmony between body and mind, as was that of the Athenians.

THE ATHENIAN'S EDUCATION.

I will, therefore, shortly describe the general course of the education in Athens as being most instructive to us.

Up to the sixth year the child was left entirely to the care of home influences. During this time, as well as after it, efforts were made to keep alive and encourage the natural freshness and joyousness of the child by means of many different games and amusements.

When the boy had entered upon his seventh year his real education—which was principally carried on apart from the home—commenced. He was placed under the care of a teacher—*paidagogos*—who accompanied him about, and watched over his morals and behaviour until he was 16 years of age. He was instructed in Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, Music and Drawing, and first and last Gymnastics.

“MENS SANA, IN CORPORE SANO.”

To strengthen the physical health, to develop the body and bodily prowess, to establish a firm moral character, to cultivate the intellect, to acquire knowledge, and to open the soul to impressions of beauty in form, were the aims of this instruction. As the principle and the belief reigned that a sound mind could not dwell but in a sound body, the bodily development naturally became the principal object of this education, and the physical exercises were made means to further intellectual progress.

METHODISED EXERCISES.

In these exercises, always practised in specially erected places—the *palæstras*—a certain methodical progression was strictly followed. From sports and games requiring but little exertion a gradual transit was made to those requiring more strength, *e.g.*, running, leaping, wrestling, throwing the discus and the javelin. Each practice was followed by a bath and a short rest. One-sidedness was carefully guarded against in these exercises, and their immediate aim—to give the boys full mastery over their bodies, a beautiful carriage, graceful movements, and a harmonious development of the different limbs; as also skill and aptitude for a many-sided employment of their powers—was never forgotten.

STATE EDUCATION IN ATHENS.

At 16 years of age the youth passed to the public Gymnasia, and from this time the State itself supervised and directed his education. The Gymnasia were much more elaborate institutions than the Palæstras, with different arrangements for various purposes, such as Gardens and Parks, open and covered Galleries for Walking, Courses for Running, Resting places, and large Baths. Statues of great men, tablets with inscriptions recording glorious deeds, and everything that tended to elevate and culture the mind, surrounded the student. Here, too, the youths had the opportunity of meeting and conversing with the most prominent men—sages and philosophers.

RESULTS

Thus the education was completed, and men were fostered who, for beauty of form and power of intellect, have never been surpassed. It is a most enchanting subject, this—the education of the ancient Athenians—and well worthy of deeper study. It has only been necessary here to mention shortly the principal features, because the results are so apparent even to this day. Their statues, admired still as the most complete works of art, show us what they were physically, and their writings, monuments of their high intellectual prominence, will live for ever.

THE ROMANS EDUCATED THE BODY FIRST.

The Romans, the second great people of culture, directed their education—at least during their best days, those of the powerful Republic—principally to fostering men suitable for strong and brave soldiers, to defend their country and extend its power. The home had here a much greater influence than among the Greeks; the mothers, especially, exercised more power. Public schools were unknown, and the Romans objected to laws, which encroached upon the liberty of the family.

ROMAN EDUCATION.

The father gave the first elementary instruction at home. Later on a special teacher—*Grammaticus*—took up the work which was often carried on in the open streets, in *Triviis*. The education was considered complete when the youth was 17 years of age, after a year's final tuition under a "*Rhetor*." During the whole period, however, the greatest attention was paid to bodily development, although the exercises were not supervised by the State, nor were they so methodically arranged as in Greece. The growing generation of all ages, boys, youths, and young men, congregated on the "*Campus Martii*," where they competed in sports and gymnastic games, often of a warlike character. That, in this way the Romans obtained what they desired—strong healthy men and brave warriors—is a matter of history. But they did not look upon physical exercises in the same way as the Greeks; that is, as of a high educational value in schooling even the mental faculties.

EARLY CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS.

In the 6th Century we hear of the first Christian Schools which were managed by the Benedictine Monks, or formed part of a Convent. The boys educated in these schools ranged from 5 to 15 years of age. The instruction was chiefly of a religious character. The life of the pupils was a hard and joyless one: punishment was the order of the day, and consisted not only of castigation, but also of isolation, and even starvation. The Cathedral Schools which succeeded those of the Monastery were very similar in character to their predecessors. They were all conducted on principles which we, with our more liberal opinions, may well style, those of religious fanaticism. The *physique* of the child was totally disregarded, and treated as something superficial and quite unessential.

In the 8th and 9th Centuries schools were established by the Emperor Charlemagne. The education was improved in many respects, but for the health of the children they cared little. Corporal punishment, the only kind of physical exercise we read of, was resorted to on the slightest provocation, and was dealt out so severely that it was enacted by law that not more than twelve strokes of the rod were to be given in immediate succession!

A BRIGHTER PICTURE.

Totally different was the life of the children of the higher class in those days. Educated, often, at the court of some exalted personage they learned, from early years, to excel in all the manly sports and pastimes that became a knight and warrior. But here we meet the other extreme—book-learning was usually much neglected.

A GLEAM OF LIGHT.

Thus for several centuries nothing whatever was done in the schools for the *physique* of the children. It is not till the 15th Century that we see, for a comparatively short time, any improvement in this respect. This beginning was made in Italy, by Vittorino von Feltre, the most celebrated educationalist of his country in that period, who introduced the subject in his renowned Academy. Pupils came from all countries to this school, and received instruction not only in the usual studies, but also in riding, wrestling, fencing, swimming, &c. This example was followed in Italy, Switzerland, and even in Germany.

The revival did not last very long. Education soon relapsed into its former groove, as far as physical exercises are concerned. Not even the period of the Reformation carried with it any improvement in this respect.

THE DAWN OF BETTER DAYS.

The dawn of a new era came, however, when attention was directed to Natural Sciences, and their introduction into the schools. A great influence in this direction had Francis Bacon, Viscount of St. Albans, who did his work between 1561—1626. Even if he did not specially recommend physical exercises in the schools, the whole tenor of his teaching tended towards that end, and became a matter for reflection to all concerned in the education of children.

At about the same period we hear voices raised to a similar purpose in other countries. In France, for example, we find the name of Michel de Montaigne (1533—92) who, both by his own writings and also by the powerful advocacy of followers whom he inspired with the same spirit, worked towards the same goal, and exercised the greatest influence upon educational questions. In a most decided manner does Montaigne express himself about the necessity for taking care of the body and hardening and strengthening the same by suitable exercises. "It is not enough," he says, "to strengthen the mind—you must also put steel in the muscles. The soul will succumb to the exertion if the body does not assist it." And again: "It is not a mind you have to educate, nor a body—it is a man, and of him you cannot make two persons."

The great German educationalist, Comenius, about the same time, not only recommends physical exercises, but also what we now call manual training, the great importance of which we, therefore, see has been appreciated long before our time.

JOHN LOCKE ON PHYSICAL EDUCATION.

But perhaps the greatest of all these men, and the one whose word was most weighty on the subject, is John Locke (1632—1704). About his prominence as an educationalist I need not speak here, and to his own countrymen; but from his medical studies he was able to treat the matter of Physical Education even more thoroughly than his predecessors in the field. Impressed especially by Montaigne's teaching, he added his medical knowledge thereto, and in his book—"Some Thoughts Concerning Education." He gives a splendid summary of his views on the subject. His maxim is "a sound mind, in a sound body." He gives detailed directions for making the body strong and healthy, in order to make it a useful and willing servant to the mind.

LOCKE'S IDEAL MAN.

Of the greatest importance are Gymnastic Exercises and Annual Training. He recommends that everybody should learn a handicraft. He considers the Physical Education of primary importance, because it gives a sound mind. Of lesser importance is the acquirement of knowledge. A physically and morally sound man is better than a learned one.

JEAN JACQUES ROSSEAU.—“NO BOOKS TILL 12 YEARS OF AGE.”

One more name must be mentioned in connection with this time and subject—that of Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712—78). His life and work are probably well known to you. His book, “*Emile, ou de l’Education*,” written in 1762, attracted the attention of the whole civilized world. Nobody has more earnestly advocated the study of Nature in the child’s education. “No books until the 12th year. The body must be strong to be a willing servant to the mind. The weaker the body, the more it commands; the stronger, the better will it obey the mind.” He will allow the child’s nature to ripen before making it a man. The enormous influence of this work upon the educationalists of the period can scarcely be imagined.

“THE PHILANTROPINISTS.”

Only a few years afterwards we find schools erected, and education conducted on these principles. The first of these schools was founded by Basedow, in Dessau, and was called the “*Philantropinum*.” Others followed, and the “*Philantropinists*,” as they were called, soon had schools in various districts, mostly in Germany and Switzerland. The most renowned of these men is, perhaps, Pestalozzi, who established several schools in Switzerland.

What most interests us in the *Philantropinists*’ system of education is, that they paved the way for a more humane treatment of the children. They tried to make the school a place of pleasure rather than one of torture; endeavoured to create in the child an inclination and love for the school studies; took care of their physical comfort, and introduced games and exercises to a greater extent than had ever been done since the times of the Greeks and Romans. The educational value and importance of healthy, physical exercises, were fully acknowledged and taken advantage of. A book on the subject, written in 1793 by Gutsmutus, a teacher in one of these schools at Schnepfenthal, shows to what an extent physical exercises were used in some places one hundred years ago.

THE FOUNDER OF RATIONAL SCHOOL-HYGIENE.

These improvements belong, however, to the new schools. In the old, long-established schools, everything was allowed to go on as before; and the condition of things in them then, is now scarcely credible. Dr. J. P. Frank (1745—1812) who may be justly called the founder of School-hygiene, gives in his works some rather curious information. Children were treated with the utmost severity, not to say, cruelty. The school-rooms were utterly unsuitable; low ceilings, badly lighted and heated, over-crowded, as a rule, and badly ventilated, or rather, not ventilated at all. Corporal punishment reigned supreme, and was meted out in a way that often endangered life and limb. It is not a bright picture, nor pleasant to contemplate.

WISDOM CRIETH IN VAIN.

We have now in our retrospect come to the earlier part of our own century. There is much left to be desired in the schools, and especially in what concerns the physical welfare of the children. We have seen that since the decay of ancient Hellas and the fall of Rome, the physical education, as far as school-life is concerned, has been much neglected. True, strong voices have been raised from time to time against this incongruence. Men, such as Bacon, Montaigne, Locke, Rousseau, and many others, have repeatedly pointed out the evil, and insisted upon reforms, but to little or no avail.

AN UNSETTLED CONTROVERSY.

After Dr. Frank’s exposures, however, when School-hygiene became a subject of study for medical men, matters altered considerably. Other physicians took up the cry against the grave faults committed in the school towards the young. This led to a controversy between Doctors and Educationalists, the latter resenting this intrusion upon their own sacred ground,—a controversy which has been carried on to this day, and is still far from settled.

PUBLIC OPINION ROUSED.

But by this dispute the attention of the general public was directed to the question, and we notice how soon the various Governments found it necessary to interfere, by thoroughly investigating the whole matter. In Saxony, Prussia, Elsass, Hesse, and other parts of Germany, commissions were formed for the study, from a hygienic stand-point, of the educational question. They all (without exception) recommended an abatement in the demands upon brainwork, and greater attention to the physical development of the pupils. A similar cry was heard from Italy, Switzerland and France.

SWEDEN EARLY IN THE FIELD.

In the Scandinavian countries, where the system of education in other respects is founded on the same principles as that of Germany, we find some differences, some tendency to improvements, especially in what concerns us here—the physical condition of the children. Similar committees were formed, as in the German States, to which we have just made reference, but they were twenty years ahead of the Germans. Physical exercises were here introduced, and regularly carried out in the schools long before a start in this direction was made by other countries. Especially has this been the case in Sweden, where, in the beginning of this century, a college was erected for the training of scientific Gymnastic Instructors. Shortly afterwards followed regulations for the schools, establishing systematic Gymnastic Exercises for the boys. Of course, this action met with resistance here, as elsewhere, and mostly from the educationalists themselves; but, in spite of all, progress continued, and I speak only my firm conviction, when I say, that at the present time nowhere are Educational Gymnastics better or more generally carried out than there.

ENGLAND'S UNIQUE POSITION.

Somewhat different is the position in England. The whole system of Education, as far as the management of the schools and the children are concerned, is quite dissimilar to that on the Continent. I need not dilate upon this, I will only point out that reference is here made to the large Public Schools, which, with their splendid situations, large open fields for practising the national sports, and their other arrangements, differ entirely from those of other countries. These advantageous conditions are not, however, apparent, when we turn to the Elementary Schools, with which we are chiefly concerned. These schools are founded, and the instruction in them is carried on under conditions which closely resemble those I have just mentioned.

REFORM EASILY ACCOMPLISHED.

But the prospects of reform here should be brighter than elsewhere, as there is firstly, the example of those Institutions to follow; and secondly, the love of the English people for out-door sports and games, is admittedly greater than that of any other people. If, therefore, the eyes of the British public are opened to discrepancies in the educational system in vogue in their schools, and particularly to faults in this direction, there is little doubt but that they will be speedily corrected.

IS THE ENGLISH EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM PERFECT?

The principal question to be answered, then, is; “Do such faults exist?” I will endeavour to express shortly some views upon the subject. The question may be most advantageously treated under the following heads.

- 1.—Is Physical Education necessary in our schools?
- 2.—If so, what position should it occupy with regard to Mental Studies?
- 3.—Under what form can Physical Education be introduced into the Schools?

I.—IS PHYSICAL EDUCATION NECESSARY?

Anybody who has watched children who have not yet attended school must have remarked how great is their need for exercise. If healthy, and allowed their natural liberty, they are scarcely ever still. Continually—except when sleeping or eating—are they romping about, and evidently enjoying themselves in a state of perpetual motion. With the greatest difficulty are they able to keep still, or to direct their attention upon any one thing. Sitting still, particularly, seems contrary to their nature and parents who try to keep their children too quiet, commit a grave mistake. If one notices a child which is uncommonly good and quiet, and which, perhaps, is praised in consequence, one may shrewdly suspect it to be in poor health, or at the beginning of some illness. This inquietude, then, is natural; it is the outcome of the rapid physiological changes which take place during the period of growth; and it is, moreover, necessary for a healthy development.

THE HARM OF TOO MUCH RESTRAINT.

Now place this child in school. For hours at a stretch, often enough, it will have to remain in its place, and with its attention fixed to the utmost. The change is sudden and quite contrary to child-nature. Two points are especially detrimental to the health of the child—the long, drawn-out sitting still, in one, often bad, position, and the want of muscular exercise. We all know that the organs of the body develop, and improve by use, and that this is especially true with regard to the muscles is too well known to need demonstrating. The muscular system must, therefore, suffer by the forced inactivity to which the child is subjected;—but that is not all.

NERVES, HEART AND LUNGS SUFFER.

The muscles constitute almost 54 per cent. of the whole weight of the body, and when they are adversely affected the whole body suffers in consequence, for the muscular movements are of the highest importance to other functions of the body. Each action is caused by and reacts upon the nervous system, upon the brain and spinal cord, to mutual further development. Again, upon the circulation of the blood. The action of the heart is stimulated, and its work of propelling the blood through the body is facilitated by muscular movements. Respiration is also benefited by exercise. The lungs are made to act more effectively, the inhalation and exhalation become deeper, more thorough, and the result is that the capacity of the chest and lungs is increased. How much the individual systems must suffer, when deprived of muscular exercise, must therefore be manifest to everyone.

THE EVILS OF TOO MUCH SITTING STILL.

Nor is this all. We mentioned the long sitting still on the school benches. How is this position generally sustained? First of all the head stoops forward, probably the trunk as well. This posture impedes the circulation in the upper parts of the body; the bending of the neck exercises a pressure upon the veins, which prevents the free flow of the blood back from the brain, thus causing a congestion in the head, resulting in headaches, bleeding from the nose, and even accelerating shortsightedness. The respiratory organs suffer likewise in this stooping position. The diaphragm, the most important of the respiratory muscles, cannot act freely, the inhalations become more shallow and insufficient; the circulation, so dependent upon a strong and powerful respiration, is therefore also influenced to disadvantage.

Actual deformities are only too often caused by this violation of natural laws. The growing, and therefore more impressionable body, gets accustomed to bad positions; it *grows* into them, and the result is crooked spines of various descriptions, pleasant memories for life of school-days. These are only a few of the results which accrue to the children from the unnatural conditions under

which their education is conducted. With these facts in view I think there can only be but one answer to our first question. If, by the introduction of suitable exercises, we can diminish or counter-act these pernicious tendencies, it is simply our duty, our imperative duty, to do so. We compel the children to attend the schools, we undertake the responsibility of their education, let us then see that we do not frustrate our own ends by spoiling the children instead of perfecting them.

2.—WHAT POSITION SHOULD PHYSICAL EDUCATION OCCUPY?

The second question is not a less important one, though it is often subject to what at least seems to me, serious misunderstanding. I have often heard such an opinion expressed as, "Physical education ought to be introduced, but not as a principal subject." Now this shows an error of judgment regarding the object for which Physical Education should be introduced. The little experience most of us have had in Physical Education has no doubt contributed to such views. One begins to regard Physical Exercises as something very nice, very pretty, rather interesting, exceedingly clever, and so on. I do not deny that it can be all that; but that is not the serious object of Physical Education, and if by injudicious displays, &c., it has been made to appear so, then the sooner a stop is put to that, and the matter is cleared up to everybody concerned the better. No; I have tried to show that a violation of natural laws is committed, when we place a child on a bench in school, and say, "Remain there for so long, and pay strict attention to what you hear and see." Our duty is then to correct this state of things, by giving the child its necessary share of movement and muscular exercises, just on the same principle that, by suitable school-rooms, we give it light, fresh air and warmth, in which to do its work. The right place for Physical Education is in the *Hygienic* arrangements of the school, of which it should form a most important part as intended to *correct* the grave faults that the general school-work is apt to commit against the physique of the child.

The third question, "How, or under what form can Physical Education be carried out in the schools" requires a chapter for itself, upon which I hope to have the opportunity of speaking on some future occasion. I will only mention that there are two forms for Physical Educational Exercises, the one is the free one of games and sports, the other that of regulated gymnastics.

Of these neither is the better; a judicious mixture of both would no doubt answer the purpose most satisfactorily.

As, however, we cannot always choose nor mix to our own liking, considering the many restraints that are imposed on our good intentions by want of space, both indoors and out, and by other circumstances, we must generalize our efforts, and find something suitable alike for well—and badly—appointed schools something that will suit every child, in whatever condition it is situated. This brings us to the question of School Gymnastics, which we will consider at some length in our next paper.

| WELLCOME INSTITUTE LIBRARY | |
|-------------------------------|----------|
| Coll. | welMOMec |
| Call No. | PAM |
| | QT 255 |
| | 1871 |
| | B86p2 |
| | |



Printed by BAILEY and MONTFORD, 55, Fann Street, Golden Lane, E.C., and Published by the Swedish Gymnastic Association, 169, Earlham Grove, Forest Gate, E.

